

70 YEARS ON, BROTHERS IN ARMS LAND IN NORMANDY

Back on Juno beach

EXCLUSIVE

BY TOM PARRY on Juno Beach

Seventy years ago today these four men took 10 minutes to cross the sands of Juno Beach to the temporary sanctuary of a track through the dunes. They were 10 stomach-wrenching minutes that have defined their whole lives.

Hearts racing, sick with fear, they heard and felt German shells landing terrifyingly close – most for the first time in their lives.

The sky was streaked orange by explosions, illuminating the bodies of comrades on the blood-drenched, smoke-filled beachhead.

For the few minutes it took to cover the 200-yard to the grassy dunes behind the Normandy coast, the odds of staying alive were stacked against them.

Yet somehow these four D-Day veterans from Essex survived the onslaught to tell the tale to their great-grandchildren.

Back then none of them knew each other. Today they are a band of brothers: Don Sheppard, 94, Geoffrey Lee and Fred Roberts, both 89, and Bob Stevens, 91.

These are the modest heroes of World War Two, the men who gave Europe its freedom. Now they are making one final stand on the beach which provides the backdrop to their most vivid memories.

Don, who heads their branch of the Normandy Veterans' Association, says this trip will be their last. Still sprightly, he helps his friends as they pose in regimental berets and blazers decked out with gleaming rows of medals.

The former Royal Engineers sapper, who lives in Basildon, has no trouble recalling his first visit to Juno Beach on June 6, 1944.

"There were Canadian bodies everywhere," he says. "Their assault troops landed first and we were the second wave. It's hard to describe the terror we all felt. No one can imagine that noise, all those screams."

"A lot of the guys were being sick. They were still very young, 17 and 18. I was so anxious and frightened. We were all trying to look after ourselves, trying to survive, really."

"We had no idea what to expect. By the time we landed the Germans were replying with very heavy fire. They had blockhouses all along the beach. It was only after that we came to realise our life expectancy was about five minutes."

"I came off in a landing ship tank which had armoured vehicles on it. I was in the turret with a mounted Bren gun."

"We went straight into a shell hole and I was submerged in the water."

"It was just completely horrible. People ask what it was like and I can only say it was worse than anything you

Four heroes return to the bloody battlefield that defined their whole lives



GOING IN Troops wade ashore to set Europe free



could ever imagine." Back then Don and his comrades were propelled by a mix of blind panic and steely resolve.

Today they shuffle slowly back up the boardwalk to the Juno Beach memorial.

The veterans – part of a 600-strong British contingent – are constantly stopped by tourists wanting pictures. Sometimes French residents shake their hands and thank them.

After making it across Juno, Don



Fred Roberts saw 'bodies everywhere' as he landed on the beach

Bob Stevens watched in horror as amphibious vehicles sank under fire

DonSheppard 'What was it like? Worse than you could ever imagine'

Geoffrey Lee He'd never been abroad before let alone under shellfire

“I no longer think of my experience... I think of the guys that never made it”

DON SHEPPARD D-DAY VET ON THE DAY HE CAN'T FORGET

old chaps, happy to chat. But the pain is never far away. I ask Geoffrey if he lost any comrades during the Normandy campaign. He cannot answer. He turns away from me and tries to stifle a tear.

"It was just pure fright," he says later. "I had never even been abroad before, let alone come under shellfire."

"I was just 19. I was quite immature as far as war was concerned. We had to come over mines on the seabed. The captain came over on the tannoy to tell us that if we went any faster they would

explode. You want to get off the boat in the first instance and then you wanted to get off that beach."

"They were calling out, 'Get off the beach, get off the beach.' Sheer panic made me get off to safety."

Fred saw horrific sights. He describes the landing craft as "like a shoebox" and not particularly seaworthy.

"There were bodies everywhere," he remembers. "On one occasion we actually ran over one. I saw legs sticking out from under the wheel. I suppose you got

callous from what you saw. It was self-preservation."

Bob watched in horror as amphibious vehicles sank under intense fire.

"There were bodies in the water. When we arrived they were stacking them up," he says. "Just horrible. I see all the signposts and it brings it back."

Even though some hope to return for private pilgrimages, most of the veterans acknowledge this 70th anniversary will be their final showpiece.

Their Normandy Veterans' Association

will disband after a service in London later this month.

Don reflects: "Now when I go to the beach I don't think about my own experience. I think about the guys that never made it."

"I think about all of the young men in the cemeteries. They stepped off the boat into the water and were gone."

"For a long time I didn't talk much about D-Day but now I think it's so

important for young people to know about it."

This weekend the veterans will board coaches back home, probably the final time they will cross the Channel.

They return safe in the knowledge that the place where they endured the toughest hours of their lives will never forget them.

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REUNITED Nobby & Len met at party

Torpedoed lad met rescuer at bash 50 yrs on

THE first time Nobby Clark crossed Len Hobbs's path he was in a daze after his ship was torpedoed by a U-boat on D-Day.

Nobby, 88, had been aboard HMS Halsted and suffered severe head injuries in the explosion. Len was on HMS Fernie, the vessel that saved him and other crew members.

The next time Nobby bumped into Len, 89, was 50 years later at a party organised by a mutual friend.

Hearing Len, from Southend, had been on board HMS Fernie he

shouted: "You saved my life." The pair had worked close to each other without knowing it and they have remained best friends ever since.

Nobby says of the torpedo blast: "You see a white streak coming towards you through the water but you can't do anything about it."

"Next thing I knew there was a big bang. I was blown down to the deck below and was covered in blood. I was hanging onto a spar for dear life."

Nobby was taken to the Fernie, where hundreds of casualties from the torpedo attack sought help. He ended up heading back home on a hospital ship.

Len says: "We stood by the Halsted all night. We took off the badly injured. Nobby was one of them. That's why Nobby and I are such good mates."

These days Len and Nobby meet up regularly at the Essex branch of the Normandy Veterans Association.



YOUNG SAILORS Nobby, top, and Len in wartime



WAR STORIES Jim Nelson in 2004

My grandad went into the battle on his 21st birthday

BY SIMON KEEGAN

On my 21st birthday my grandfather cried. I asked him why and he replied: "Because I'm glad you're not going through what I had to."

Jim Nelson's 21st birthday was on D-Day and he told me all about it before he died nine years ago. He was from Bootle but his local regiment was "full" and so he joined the 2nd Battalion, the East Yorkshire regiment, a Scouser among Yorkshire lads.

As they trained on landing craft in Scotland he was seasick every time.

Jim and his mates landed on Sword Beach. Before it began, his CO poured him a large rum. Jim was puzzled but was told: "Don't tell me you've forgotten your 21st birthday!"

Jim said: "Shells and mortars were raining down and we could hear the whine of our shells". But for the first time he wasn't seasick.

One the beach Jim and his best mate Eddy dug themselves into a trench. At his funeral in 2005 Eddy told me how several men came under fire right next to explosive fuel drums and in a heroic act which saved lives Jim threw them one by one into the sea. He had never bothered to tell me that story himself.

Next he was knocked off his feet by a blast. "They got me, Eddy" he gasped... but they could find no wound. Only when he finally changed his shirt two weeks did he find shrapnel in his back. It stayed there all his life.

As they fought up the beach they met a British soldier who lay dying with his legs blown off. When asked if they could do anything he wanted only for a cigarette and said: "Get the bastards".

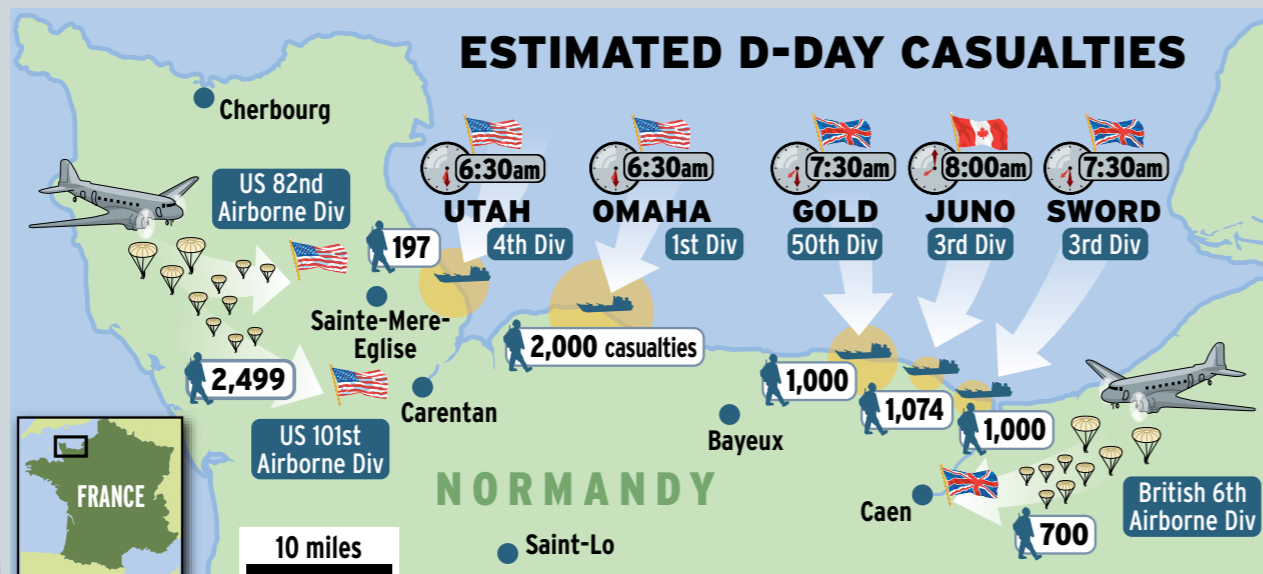
Jim told me: "I think that was the bravest man I ever met."



INTO BATTLE Jim in uniform

D-DAY IN NUMBERS

- 156,115 Allied troops landed: 61,715 Brits, 21,400 Canadians and 73,000 Americans against roughly 50,000 well-entrenched Germans.
- 10,000 Allies' estimated casualties during landings: 4,500 dead, plus killed, wounded, missing and captured. Generals had anticipated 10,000 dead and 30,000 wounded - 30,000 stretchers were issued.
- 11,590 planes supported the D-Day landings. They made 20,000 sorties over the course of the day and 127 aircraft were lost.
- 4,126 landing craft set sail plus 1,213 naval combat ships.
- 80 miles of coastline that the Allies fought along
- 288 days to plan Operation Overlord, which lasted 85 days.
- 900,000 Allied troops entered the battlezone before the Germans realised Normandy was not a feint and finally sent reinforcements.
- 21 German divisions stayed on the wrong coast for two months after a ghost army of dummy camps, planes and tanks were assembled in Kent and Essex to convince the Nazis that the attack would be at Calais.



Operation Overlord... as it happened

Tuesday June 6, 1944, 12.16am: Six gliders from 6th Airborne division land to capture two vital bridges near beaches.

03.15: Pegasus Bridge cafe owner Georges Gondrée becomes the first Frenchman to be liberated by the Allied forces.

05.10: 92 landing craft approach beaches.

05.15: At sunrise, 16 landing craft stop 5,000 yards from Omaha beach. German Major Werner Pluskat sees Channel full of ships.

05.30: News reaches Hitler's Bavarian Alps HQ. No one wants to wake him. Naval bombardment of beach defences begins.

06.30: Landing craft under fire at Omaha beach. Many soldiers drown weighed down by equipment. Those who make it

face mines and machine guns.

06.45: On Omaha beach US forces suffer huge losses.

07.30: British 50th Infantry Division and 8th Armoured Brigade land at Gold.

07.49: Allies now on all five beaches - Juno, Sword, Gold, Omaha and Utah.

08.15: The next wave of Canadian and British troops land on Juno beach.

9.00: Hitler is awake at last but in a deadly mistake he asserts that Normandy is a diversion for the real invasion at Calais.

09.15: First commandos land on Sword beach before marching eight miles to protect bridges captured by paratroopers

10.30: In Caen Prison, the Gestapo execute

political prisoners including farmers, policemen, fishermen and rail workers.

10.45: Eastern end of Gold almost secure after fierce fighting and huge casualties.

1.30pm: A fierce battle at Omaha beach with almost 20,000 troops landed begins to turn in the Allies' favour.

4.00: Hitler orders extra Panzer tank divisions to be moved to Normandy.

5.45: More troops arrive on all beaches.

10.45: On Sword beach six square miles have been taken with 29,000 Allied troops landed and 1,000 casualties. On Omaha beach there are 4,184 casualties.

Midnight: All five beachheads have been established, covering 50 miles.

Follow today's events

- Chris Evans** BBC Radio 2, 6.30am Live from Arranches beach with veterans, Dame Vera Lynn and historian Antony Beevor.
- D-Day 70: The Heroes Return** BBC1 TV 9.15am, 1.30pm, 8pm Huw Edwards presents three live broadcasts from Normandy with the Queen, world leaders and veterans leading the commemorations alongside the 4,000 graves of British troops at the Bayeux War Cemetery.
- Jeremy Vine** Radio 2, Noon Live from HMS Belfast, which fired one of first shots on D-Day and spent five weeks supporting the invasion troops.
- D-Day 70 Years On** Radio 2, 8pm, and at cinemas around UK: ddayconcert.com
- Royal Albert Hall show with Patrick Stewart as Churchill and a virtual We'll Meet Again duet with Katherine Jenkins and Dame Vera.
- Normandy '44: The Battle Beyond D-Day** BBC2 TV, 9.30pm Historian James Holland looks at the 77-day campaign for control of Normandy that followed the D-Day landings of June 6, 1944, challenging some of the myths that have grown.
- Radio 4 Extra** Online Special day of dramas, documentaries and discussions at bbc.co.uk/radio4extra



70 YEARS ON: WORLD LEADERS PAY TRIBUTE



They waged war so that we might know peace

Obama calls on D-Day spirit to unite globe against horrors

JOINED FORCES
World leaders yesterday

GREAT AND THE GOOD
(AND NOT SO GOOD)

1. President of the French Senate Jean-Pierre Bel
2. French Prime Minister Manuel Valls
3. Ukrainian President-elect Petro Poroshenko
4. Slovakian President Ivan Gasparovic
5. King Harald of Norway
6. US President Barack Obama - his great uncle Ralph was in the US Army and landed at Omaha beach four days after D-Day
7. Queen Elizabeth II
8. French President Francois Hollande
9. Queen Margrethe II of Denmark
10. Russian President Vladimir Putin
11. Grand Duke Henri of Luxembourg
12. Greek President Karolos Papoulias
13. President of the French National Assembly Claude Bartolone
14. Luxembourg Prime Minister Xavier Bettel
15. President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy
16. Belgium Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo
17. Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper
18. King Philippe of Belgium
19. Czech Republic President Milos Zeman
20. Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski
21. Italian President Giorgio Napolitano
22. New Zealand Governor-General Jerry Mateparae
23. King Willem-Alexander of The Netherlands
24. German Chancellor Angela Merkel
25. Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott
26. Wife of the Czech Republic President Czech Ivana Zemanova
27. Wife of the Greek President May Papoulias
28. British Prime Minister David Cameron - his grandfather was a Major in the British Army and wounded at D-Day
29. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte
30. Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg
31. Princess Charlene of Monaco
32. Prince Albert II of Monaco



BY **TOM PARRY**
in Ouistreham, France

THEY came from across the globe to honour the young heroes who stepped on to these beaches of hell 70 years ago to begin the obliteration of the evil forces of fascism.

And as world leaders including Barack Obama, David Cameron and Vladimir Putin stood shoulder to shoulder to express gratitude for the sacrifices made by those brave souls, they were left to reflect on the horrors of wars and how to avoid them.

As they surveyed the 2,000 stooped and wheelchair-bound D-Day veterans gathered before them in the blistering heat - all in their late 80s and 90s - they would have been hit by a sense of duty to make sure no one ever has to suffer what these men did all those years ago in a bid to achieve world peace.

Mr Putin came face to face with Ukrainian president-elect Petro Poroshenko for the first time since the two nations became embroiled in bitter hostilities over the Crimea.

Mr Obama, who was joined at the event by the Queen, reminded the warring parties, and all the other dignitaries gathered on Sword Beach, that the world should treasure the peace the Normandy landings eventually brought after ridding Europe of Adolf Hitler's tyrannical and murderous regime.

In an emotional speech, the US president said: "These men waged war so that we might know peace. They sacrificed so that we might be free. They fought in hopes of a day when we'd no longer need to fight. We are grateful to them."

"America's claim to liberty, equality and freedom is written in the blood on these beaches and it will endure for eternity."

Mr Obama spoke at the spot near Colleville sur Mer where so many men were cut down in one of the bloodiest battles of the war.

Telling of the moment 156,000 of men left the shores of Britain to embark on the decisive strike against the Nazi machine, he added: "Fresh-faced GIs rubbed trinkets, kissed pictures of sweethearts,



UNITED IN THANKS
Mr Obama and the Queen at Sword Beach

Brief encounter may end Ukraine fighting

THE leaders of Russia and Ukraine came together to pledge peace as they honoured war heroes.

President Vladimir Putin met Petro Poroshenko - who will be sworn in today as his Ukraine's president - after the photocall of leaders in Normandy. They shook hands after being brought together by Germany's Angela Merkel, despite clashes between Kiev's forces and pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine.

Mr Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said they spoke of "the soonest end to bloodshed" and "confirmed there is no alternative to settling the situation by peaceful political means".

More peace broke out as a feared awkward encounter between Mr Putin and Prince Charles was avoided.

The Prince reportedly compared Mr Putin to Adolf Hitler last month. But the two men did not meet in the VIP stand and the Russian leader applauded as Charles walked up to greet French president Francois Hollande.



MINDING THE GAP
Charles glances towards Mr Putin

Pictures: PHIL COBURN

checked and rechecked their equipment. And more than 150,000 souls set off towards this tiny slither of sand upon which hung more than the fate of a war, but the course of human history.

"By daybreak blood soaked the water, and bombs broke the sky. By the end of that longest day, this beach had been fought, lost, refought and won... a piece of Europe once again liberated and free."

Mr Obama was joined by French president Francois Hollande at the unprecedented gathering of dignitaries. He echoed his US counterpart's call for the D-Day sacrifices to stand as a lasting reminder the world needs peace.

He said: "It's up to us to have the same vision, the same courage, to be just as bright and have the same determination as those who came to these beaches 70 years ago."

There were 18 heads of state at the event, one of the biggest gatherings of world leaders in history.

They included German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Canadian PM Stephen Harper and Australian PM Tony Abbott.

But the real stars of the show were the dwindling band of veterans. They had arrived on coaches organised by the Normandy Veterans Association from across Britain. In the wilting heat, they once again showed their fortitude during a day of exhausting commemorations that started at 3pm. But for many the day had begun much earlier with a service of remembrance in Bayeux.

More services followed at British war cemeteries before the arrived at Sword Beach.

EMOTIONAL Douglas Turtle is overcome at service for fallen

where 70 years ago thousands of Brits raced out of landing craft into the muddy water into a blizzard of enemy fire to launch the invasion of mainland Europe. They were cheered loudly as they appeared at the ceremony at Ouistreham - with their bravery medals glinting in the piercing sunshine.

The old men looked proud, upright and - above all - modest. But the emotions became too much for some - as they tearfully reflected on the horrors of D-Day and remembered fallen comrades. For many, this could be their final visit.

And it was not just British veterans who

brought home the symbolism of the occasion by giving a hug to a one-time foe as they met on the beach. The 89-year-old, who now lives in Ouistreham and was captured after D-Day, said: "What we experienced must never come back. No war in Europe. We have to get along with one another."

After a re-enactment of D-Day, with a dance troupe demonstrating the battles in front of black and white footage of the war, a spectacular aerial display took place out to the sea.

Some of the veterans looked exhausted as the day came to a close late last night.

Back in Britain, there were also events to mark the occasion. One old soldier, Douglas Turtle, 91, from the Isle of Wight, was spotted wiping away a tear at a service in Portsmouth, Hants.

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RUSTY SHELLS FROM THE GREAT WAR STILL TAKE LIVES



TRAGEDY Aaron Dugmore 'Bullied' boy of 9 hanged in bedroom

BY MARTIN FRICKER

A BOY of nine who said he was being bullied at school hanged himself in his bedroom after a family row, an inquest heard yesterday. Aaron Dugmore, who had learning difficulties, was so young he would not have appreciated the consequences of his actions, the hearing was told.

Mum Kelly sent him to his room after a row at home in Erdington, Birmingham. She told the court: "I heard a scream and went upstairs and saw Aaron hanging."

She said he told her that other pupils picked on him but had never talked of harming himself.

The coroner called the death an "absolute tragedy"

Police said that incidents at the school had been "dealt with appropriately" and they had found no evidence of systematic bullying.

Verdict: Accident.



QUIDS IN Poxtons got house Couple's joy at new home bought for £1

BY DAVID ASPINALL

A COUPLE who bought a house for just a pound have moved into their refurbished home which could now be worth up to £70,000.

Lawrence Poxton, 48, and wife Teresa, 46, were among thousands who applied for 33 rundown homes put up for sale by a council.

Those chosen received a £30,000 low interest loan to do up the dumps. Bus driver Lawrence and his wife are the first people to move in.

He said of their two-bed terrace: "It's fantastic. It has a new roof, windows, doors, central heating and insulation. We can't wait to spend the rest of our lives here."

Lawrence said: "We stand out but we've bought Britain's cheapest house - what more can we ask for?"

300m
Number of unexploded bombs buried in northern France and Belgium

629
tons of explosives have been removed by bomb disposal experts in 4 years

360
Number of people killed in Ypres alone by bombs since the end of the war

500
Number of people injured by bombs in Ypres since the war

400
Number of bombs found on the farm owned by the Delpottes, right



FARMERS Hilde and Wim Delputte with some of the bombs they found
Pictures: ROGER ALLEN



FEARSOME Mud flies into the air as ordnance explodes during wartime



RELICS WW1 shells at bomb disposal base in Boezinge



DARING Cpl Nico Sierens with recently found shells

The iron harvest

EXCLUSIVE BY TOM PARRY in Boezinge, Belgium



British and German forces launched more than a billion shells and bombs at each other as they fought in vain to break the stalemate in the mud on the Western Front. The lethal ordnance killed millions on both sides during the First World War - and it continues to do so to this day. Nearly 100 years since the conflict ended, an estimated 300 million unexploded bombs lie buried under farmland of Northern France and Belgium. As recently as March, two construction workers in Ypres died when a shell exploded. The Belgians call it the iron harvest, and there is a team of army bomb disposal experts permanently stationed here. In the past four years alone, they have removed some 629 tons of bombs, shells and other explosives on former battle lines in Flanders. More and more are being found because of growing development in the region and modern tractors ploughing much deeper than in the past. It is a constant fear for the people who

live here. Farmer Wim Delputte, 46, tells me how he was ploughing his potato field when the blades got stuck on hidden metallic objects. Jumping down from his tractor, he went to examine the obstruction - a cluster of rusted, mud-covered shells. As he looked at the cache of unexploded munitions, he realised there were hundreds of bombs embedded in the earth. Carefully he detached the plough and drove back to his farmhouse to alert his wife Hilde, 43, and their two daughters, eight and 11, who were playing nearby. The devices, undisturbed since 1918, could go off at any moment. Most are not duds but live explosives which sank into the quagmire instead of detonating. Bombs designed to kill in the four years of the Great War have killed more than 360 since, and injured more than 500 around Ypres alone. And the danger does not just come from explosions. Many of the shells contain lethal poison gas. Chlorine, phosphene and mustard gas were all deployed by one side or another during the conflict. "There is always a fear that we might tread on one and set one off," Hilde tells

me, holding deactivated shells the family have kept as souvenirs. They also have some grenades - known to British soldiers as Fritz sticks - in an outhouse. "I have had to explain to the children that if they see objects like this they don't go near," he says. "The dread is always there and it has definitely affected the girls. In total we have found about 400 on the farm. It must have been where some very heavy fighting happened. "Every year we hear stories from the village, from our neighbours, of bombs that have exploded." A few miles from the farm, in the village of Boezinge, is the base for a Belgian army



FIREPOWER British artillery in battle in 1916

unit permanently tasked with making the tons of unexploded bombs safe. The bomb disposal experts are among the busiest in the world despite dealing with ammunition from a century-old war. They are called out every day by farmers and construction workers.

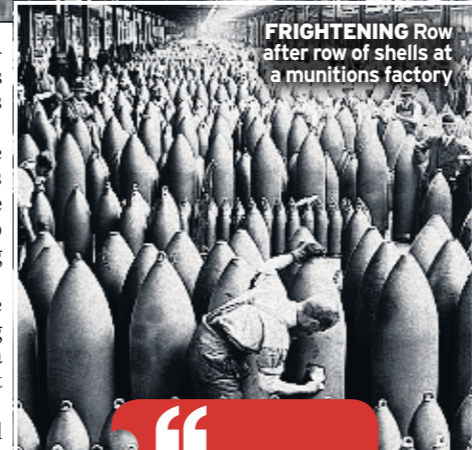
Dirk Gunst, 2nd Lieutenant with the 70-strong ammunition destruction squad, says the last year has been particularly hectic. He was under pressure to ensure there were no bombs next to the Tour de France route when the cycling race passed through Ypres last week.

The Delputte farm is so peaceful it is hard to imagine the constant blasts which would have echoed across the flat fields a century ago. Yet it was once on the frontline of the infamous Ypres Salient, where Allied troops endured four years of bombardment. Fields as far as the eye can see across the flat terrain harbour a host of different, equally lethal bombs which were given grimly humorous nicknames by the Tommies in the trenches. They called German artillery shells fired

from 77mm field guns whizz-bangs and British trench mortars which were fired from Howitzers were toffee apples.

The bombs Wim discovered are probably German munitions which landed ineffectively on the British side of the line. He has also found detonators and fuses lying dormant in the soil. Some shells he discovered were arranged in a heap, suggesting they were probably left over by a gun crew that had to retreat during one of the battles. It took the army experts several hours to painstakingly remove the munitions and load them up to be safely exploded in a secured area.

Ypres was where trench warfare started in earnest, the scene of five costly battles. Both sides dug in following the 1914 Race to the Sea - in which German forces were prevented from reaching the French ports of Calais and Boulogne. The second Battle of Ypres in 1915 saw the first use of gas in the war and the almost total annihilation of the city itself. At Passchendaele, the bloodiest offensive,



FRIGHTENING Row after row of shells at a munitions factory

“We fear no danger but don't go in for heroics. We stick to a system”
BOMB DISPOSAL EXPERT BASED IN YPRES, BELGIUM

in 1917, the British broke through German lines but rain turned the area into an impassable swamp.

The total number of Allied and German casualties exceeded 850,000; of these 325,000 were British soldiers. Not surprisingly, people in the outlying villages of northern Belgium keep strictly to marked routes when they go for a Sunday afternoon stroll. Lieutenant Gunst explains that more than 20 of his Belgian Army comrades have been killed since the unit was formed in 1919.

In 1986, a massive German mortar blew up after it was transported to the unit's depot near the small town of Poelkappele. His colleagues, who work in team of three, have suffered burns from mustard and phosphene gas shells. "We fear no danger but we don't go in for heroics," the 41-year-old officer says. "We have a system in place with the police and fire brigade. "Some calls are prioritised as urgent, say shells found near a school or busy crossroads. Or there are those churned out by a

farmer and left lying on the edge of a lonely field which don't require much attention. "No shell should be touched unless it is by us. Not only could the fuse suddenly decide to do its work, the shell might be toxic, or even the outside may be contaminated by chemical weapons that have lain in the soil next to it."

All munitions handled by the unit are placed in trucks that contain sand to reduce vibration. Once back at the deliberately obscure HQ, shells which are thought to contain chemicals are subject to X-ray. If the shell is found to be toxic, the team identifies which type of poison lies inside the corroded casing. They defuse some of the munitions by steaming out the explosives and making safe the fuses. The rest of the conventional shells are taken to a field bordered by earth banks to be detonated in controlled explosions. A lump of explosive and an anti-tank mine are attached to the shell and a warning siren rings out. For the people of Ypres, the iron harvest is a constant reminder of the war to end

all wars. Human remains are also regularly found. And Flanders' fields continue to offer up the skeletons of British soldiers who lost their lives in horrific circumstances and were left clinging to the barbed wire in no man's land. But, incredibly, some people here actually did well from the inhuman conflict. Unexploded bombs were so plentiful in Belgium immediately after the war that one family even made a business out of recycling them. Annemie Six runs a metal manufacturing company which was founded by her grandparents, who melted down munitions found on the land for scrap. "After the war they needed a way of making a little money because they were not very well off," she explains. "So my grandmother had the idea of collecting the scraps of war like shells made from lead and copper." Unlike the hordes of British tourists who come to Ypres to visit the cemeteries, the people who live here do not think of the First World War as distant history. It remains a very dangerous factor in their daily lives.

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SUNDAY Mirror

If you should die, think only this of me
 In that still quietness where is space for thought,
 Where parting, loss and bloodshed shall not be,
 And men may rest themselves and dream of nought

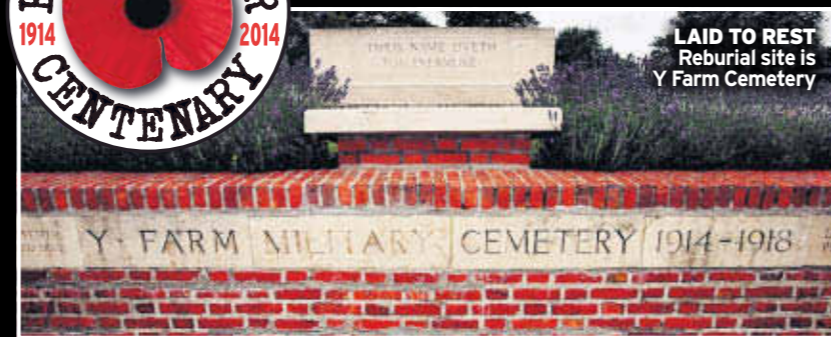
For the Fallen

Commemorative poetry supplement
 INSIDE tomorrow's Sunday Mirror
#ForTheFallen

#Madeuthink

PRINT - ONLINE - TABLET - MOBILE

WW1 HEROES NAMED IN DNA TESTS



Results of the DNA testing

Further to our recent communication regarding your relative, Private John Brameld, I am pleased to advise that he has been identified through DNA as one of the 15 soldiers found at Beaucamp Ligny. We are now in the process of informing all the families.

The results will be announced at the meeting at Endcliffe Hall in Sheffield on 20 March 2014 and we will inform the media later that day. We would therefore request your discretion until after the release.

I am pleased your relative has been identified and thank you for participating in the DNA testing. Please contact me with any questions or concerns you may have.

MATCH Confirmation letter sent to John's grandchildren

Finding Private Brameld



EXCLUSIVE
 BY TOM PARRY
 in Beaucamps-Ligny, France

Standing on a patch of drab waste ground in northern France, I try to imagine the anguished deaths of 15 British soldiers on this exact spot a century ago during the First World War. Today it is hauntingly quiet in Beaucamps-Ligny. But back then the air was filled with the rattle of machine guns and the screams of the dying.

This is where the remains of Private John Brameld and his York and Lancaster Regiment comrades have been uncovered. Until now his only memorial has been a name on the Ploegsteert Memorial nine miles away in southern Belgium, dedicated to 11,000 soldiers with no known grave.

Guy Behorel, 60, a lifelong village resident, was here when the bodies were found during building work. And he tells me how the legend of the Tommies' bravery has been passed down through five generations.

So when Private Brameld is finally given a full military burial in October, he will be laid to rest by his own descendants - and by the villagers who have been in his debt for 100 years.

"My great-grandparents were in the forest behind us when the

battle took place," says Guy, who is Beaucamps' deputy mayor.

"They were terrified, sheltering in a cave because houses were being shelled. There was a horrific battle for the Chateau de Flandres on October 18, 1914.

"What happened to the British men was appalling. They were trapped and couldn't escape the German bombardment. They buried the dead on the spot. During the excavation, they found horse remains as well. They paid these men no respect.

"This village was occupied by the Germans for the four years of the war. We have always known these men would be buried somewhere near here, but we never knew the exact place. We are all extremely happy they will have a dignified burial at last. They tried to save our village."

Private Brameld, a 30-year-old steel worker and father of two from Sheffield, is one of 10 British soldiers identified following the mass grave's discovery in 2010.

DNA tests on his grandchildren, still living in Sheffield, confirmed his name following several years of painstaking work by British Army officials.

Granddaughter Maureen Simpson, 76, is travelling to France for the re-interment ceremony at Y Farm Cemetery in nearby Bois Grenier. "It feels wonderful for

the whole family to finally be able to bury him," says the mother of two. "My dad was in the Army too and was obsessed by what happened to his own father. He had only been a toddler when he died.

"Every year he would take us to the war memorial on Remembrance Day but we didn't really know much about Grandad.

"My dad used to go to France all the time to look, but we never found him. All we had was his name on the monument.

"I think they've done a fantastic job. It just closes the book, doesn't it? It puts an end to wondering what's happened to them. It is what my dad always wanted."

Every year around 60 bodies of First World War soldiers are unearthed across the countryside of the Western Front, which runs through Belgium and northern France. Most happen by accident during building work.

In Beaucamps, a digger driver who was making a hole for sewage works for council housing struck a skull.

Local police were alerted, and they in turn contacted the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Over the following days tons of earth were dug up to reveal ammunition, scraps of webbing, regimental buttons, and the human remains.

One skeleton was found clasping a water bottle with a pipe close to the other hand. Coins, clasp knives and toothbrushes were also found.

The bodies were transferred to

CWGC mortuary in Ypres, Belgium, and the slow process of identification began.

Until now MoD officials have had to rely on personal effects like metal bracelets and dog-tags as identifiers. Those bodies found without them have been recorded on their headstones as "A soldier of the Great War, known unto God".

This is the first time soldiers have been successfully matched with their families by DNA testing. Private Brameld was an Army reservist mobilised like thousands of others when Britain declared war on Germany on August 4, 1914.

He was part of the British Expeditionary Force - the men called up in the first few months who tracked the advancing

Germans as they moved west. After embarking for the port of St Nazaire in September, they were caught up in the March to the Sea when British forces stopped the capture of key French ports.

Marching alongside The Buffs - the Royal East Kent Regiment - the York and Lancaster infantry captured Radinghem, a mile away without much opposition.

They advanced across a small plateau, 300 yards wide, towards the woods where the Chateau de Flandres used to stand. There they came under a heavy crossfire of machine guns and shrapnel, suffering terrible casualties.

In all, 58 soldiers from the regiment died that day. By the end of the conflict, the chateau was reduced to rubble.

Also killed was Private William Singyard.

identified through a DNA sample from his second cousin twice removed, Barry Singyard, 65, of Heckington, Lincs.

Although the retired engineer does not live in the soldier's home town of Newcastle he was contacted because of his unusual surname.

Others named include Lance Corporal William Warr, 27, of Dorset, whose brother Charles was also lost a few days later.

"I think it is absolutely amazing that William has been found," says his nephew Alan, 61, from Somerset.

"We knew that he had probably worked on the family smallholding and he had been killed in the war, but that was all we knew."

Sue Raftree, of the MoD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre in Gloucester, heads the team which identifies remains found on First World War battlefields and aircraft crash sites.

They traced Private Brameld's surviving family, working with DNA specialists, genealogists and military historians.

Five more found during the renovation work have so far not been named.

"It is a privilege to do the work we do, especially when we can identify them," Sue tells me.

"There are many thousands of bodies

that will continue to be found when roads are widened and when excavations take place for new buildings."

Very slowly, the 300,000 British unknown soldiers who died without a formal burial are being crossed off a very long list.

Earlier this year 20 who died in the Battle of Loos on the Western Front in 1915 were reburied after their remains were found during excavation work for a new prison.

Only one, Pte William McAleer, was identified through a metal identity tag. Regimental insignia revealed which regiments some of the other men belonged to, but it was impossible to know exactly who they were.

Nearly 60,000 British troops were killed in the biggest offensive of 1915 with thousands buried in mass graves.

At the grand Thiepval arch in the Somme, further south, chiselled scrolls display the names of the 72,000 troops who died there.

It is dedicated to fallen men "to whom the fortune of war denied the known and honoured burial given to their comrades in death" - just like Private Brameld.

Finally - a century late - he will receive the dignified burial he deserves.

And now he is not just "known unto God" - he is known to his family too.

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“What happened to the British men was appalling... they buried the dead right here

GUY BEHOREL, DEPUTY MAYOR OF BEAUCAMPS-LIGNY

